



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Greece

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2004](#)

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Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy. On March 7, the New Democracy party won the majority of seats in the unicameral Vouli (parliament) in free and fair elections. Its leader, Constantinos Karamanlis, has been Prime Minister since March. The judiciary is independent.

The national police and security services are responsible for internal security and are under the Ministry of Public Order. Civilian authorities maintained effective control of all security forces. Some members of the police and security forces committed human rights abuses.

The country has a market economy with a large public sector and a population of approximately 11 million. For the year, economic growth was estimated at 4 percent and inflation at 3.5 percent. Wages generally kept pace with inflation.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Security forces sometimes abused persons, particularly illegal immigrants and Roma. There were reports of police torture of illegal immigrants. Overcrowding and harsh conditions continued in some prisons. Police sweeps resulted in the detention of undocumented immigrants, frequently under squalid conditions. There were legal limits on the freedom of association of ethnic minorities. Some leaders of minority religions reported difficulty with the authorities, but others noted a general improvement in government tolerance. Despite Vouli approval, construction of a new Islamic cultural center and mosque in Athens had not started by year's end, and Muslims in Athens continued praying in unofficial mosques. Laws that restricted freedom of speech remained in force, and some legal restrictions and administrative obstacles on freedom of religion persisted. Violence and discrimination against women were problems. Women are underrepresented at the decision-making level in political, economic, and academic fields. Discrimination against ethnic minorities and Roma remained a problem. There were reports that foreign children were forced into begging, including by their families. Trafficking in women and children was a problem. Many Roma lived in sub-standard conditions, and their settlements often lacked access to running water, electricity, sanitation, and other essential services. Romani children often were not enrolled in school or dropped out at a very early stage of their schooling.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1

Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary and Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

In August, two police officers were charged with homicide for the December 2003 killing of a person who did not stop at a routine automobile checkpoint in Herakleion, Crete; however, a trial date had not been set by year's end.

A border policeman was charged with homicide in the September 2003 shooting and killing of an Albanian who was trying to cross illegally into the country. The policeman's trial was scheduled for February 2005.

During the year, at least 16 migrants died and at least 8 others were severely injured in poorly marked minefields on the border with Turkey.

In October, a court sentenced four members of the terrorist group Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle (ELA) to 25 years in prison for the 1994 murder of a police officer, attempted murders, bombings, and possession of firearms and explosives. A court was scheduled to hear appeals of the convictions in February 2005.

A court hearing was scheduled for December 2005 on the appeals of 15 members of the terrorist group Revolutionary

Organization 17 November who were convicted and sentenced in December 2003 for crimes including homicide.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices; however, security forces abused some persons, particularly immigrants and Roma (see Section 5).

Human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have repeatedly alleged that illegal immigrants and refugees are subjected to violence by border guards and coast guard officers when caught entering the country illegally.

In August, two civilians alleged that police beat them in Pyrgos, Peloponnese during a routine identity check. The local police director ordered an inquiry; however, no results had been released by year's end.

Amnesty International alleged that 3 armed forces officers abused and beat 10 illegal immigrants on an islet in the Aegean in September. The Army general staff ordered an inquiry into the charges; however, no results were announced by year's end.

In December, police officers allegedly subjected a group of Afghan asylum-seekers to interrogation techniques that included torture (see Section 2.d.).

There were no developments by year's end in either the civil lawsuit against three officers or the police investigation arising from the allegations of two Kalamata high school students that police beat them during a routine identity check in July 2003.

There were no developments in the July 2003 case of two Britons who alleged that police beat them.

By year's end, authorities had not taken any action on the September 2003 allegations that border police tortured three migrants attempting to return to Albania.

In September, in the first trial of its kind for immigrant abuse, the Military Court of Thessaloniki sentenced a former conscript to a 1-year suspended prison term for shooting and injuring an elderly Albanian at the border in 2002. During the trial, the NGOs Greek Helsinki Monitor and Albanian Helsinki Committee presented the court with 25 similar cases.

There were no developments during the year in the Ministry of Public Order investigations into the alleged 2002 police torture of Nigerian national Joseph Okeke or the alleged 2002 beating and torture of Yannis Papacostas in a police station near Athens. In January, the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) alleging violation of the article of the European Convention on Human Rights that prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

On October 15, the naval court of Hania sentenced one Coast Guard officer to a 2½-year suspended prison term for sexual assault and sentenced five other officers to 1½-year suspended prison terms for abuse and maltreatment. The victims, who were part of a group of approximately 160 migrants on a Turkish boat towed by the Coast Guard in 2001, claimed that the officers beat them while they were detained in Crete.

Security forces reportedly arrested and beat journalists during the year (see Section 2.a.).

Police abused Roma more frequently than other minority groups. Immigrants, including Albanians, also accused police of abuse (see Section 5).

Conditions in some prisons remained harsh due to overcrowding and outdated facilities. As of October, the Ministry of Justice reported that the total prison population was 8,541, while the total capacity of the prison system was 5,584. Juveniles were generally held separately from adults, and women were held separately from men. Pretrial detainees were held with a few convicted prisoners awaiting trials in Korydallos Prison. Construction continued on four new prisons.

Conditions in detention centers for illegal immigrants remained harsh, particularly for females at the Drapetsona detention center (see Section 2.d.).

According to local and international independent human rights observers, the Government did not consistently permit these observers' visits to police detention centers, to detention centers for illegal immigrants, or to prisons. International human rights observers reported fewer problems in having their requests for visits granted than did local human rights observers. A Ministry of Justice representative stated that requests for prison visits had not been made during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, the police conducted large-scale sweeps and temporarily detained large numbers of foreigners, often under squalid conditions, while determining their residence status. Some foreigners were detained indefinitely without judicial review.

All police forces are under the authority of the Ministry of Public Order. During the year, the Bureau of Internal Affairs of the Ministry of Public Order took several disciplinary measures, including dismissal and suspension, against officers involved in corruption, primarily for forging documents and taking bribes. During the year, 325 complaints were filed with the Bureau. Most charges against police involved violation of duty, false certificates, abuse of power, corruption, violations with arms and explosives, illegal release of persons in police custody, pimping, and violations relating to alien registration. By the end of the year, the Bureau filed lawsuits against 75 policemen, 20 civil servants, and 78 civilians.

The press and the Greek Helsinki Monitor alleged that penalties for corrupt or abusive police were too weak and discouraged citizens from pressing charges against police. A weak record of prosecution of police misbehavior supported these claims.

In October, an Ombudsman's report on internal inquiries into maltreatment and abuse of citizens by the police found that penalties against police were imposed mainly in cases made public by the press; that the results of the inquiries were not made known to interested parties without the intervention of the Ombudsman; and that police authorities were generally not inclined to launch inquiries or to discipline their personnel.

A June 2003 Ombudsman's report on police abuse found that police took citizens to detention centers for arbitrary identity checks, used insulting language and threats of force, and conducted bodily searches in public. Most citizens were released within hours of being detained for identity checks.

Police corruption was a problem. While the anticorruption unit of the Hellenic Police stated the problem was decreasing, human rights and antitrafficking groups said that anticorruption efforts needed to be given higher priority.

The Constitution requires judicial warrants for arrests except when they are made during the commission of a crime, and the law prohibits arbitrary arrest orders; the authorities generally respected these provisions in practice. By law, the police must bring persons who are detained or arrested before an examining magistrate within 24 hours. The magistrate must issue a detention warrant or order their release within 3 days unless special circumstances justify a 2-day extension of this limit.

Defendants have the right to legal counsel. In felony cases, the Bar Association provides lawyers to defendants who prove they cannot afford legal counsel.

Defendants brought to court on the day following the alleged commission of a misdemeanor may be tried immediately under expedited procedures. Although legal safeguards, including representation by counsel, apply in expedited procedure cases, the short time period limited defendants' ability to present an adequate defense. Defendants may request a delay to prepare a defense, but the court is not obliged to grant it. Expedited procedures were used in less than 10 percent of applicable cases.

Detention of both illegal and legal immigrants by police was common. The police conducted many large-scale sweeps of neighborhoods populated by immigrants, temporarily detaining large numbers of individuals while determining their residence status. Police sweeps were heightened in the period before the Olympic Games.

Police regularly detained members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses, usually after receiving complaints that they were proselytizing (see Section 2.c.).

The law allows pretrial detention for up to 18 months for felonies and 9 months for misdemeanors. Defense lawyers asserted that pretrial detention is excessively long and overused by judges. A panel of judges may release detainees pending trial, with or without bail. Pretrial detainees made up 31 percent of those incarcerated and contributed to overcrowding.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The judicial system consists of three levels of civil courts (first instance, appeals, and supreme), three levels of criminal courts (first instance--divided into misdemeanor and felony divisions, appeals, and supreme), appointed judges, and an examining magistrate system, with trials by judicial panels.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Due to serious bureaucratic problems in the legalization process for immigrants, many aliens were in a semi-legal status (had expired permits but had filed for renewal, or were entitled to renewal but a renewal stamp had not yet been placed in their

passports) and were subject to deportation without legal process following police sweeps.

Defendants who do not speak Greek have the right to a court-appointed interpreter. According to several immigrant associations in Athens, the low fees paid for such work often resulted in poor interpretation. Foreign defendants who used these interpreters frequently complained that they did not understand the proceedings at their trials. Defendants often were not advised of their rights during arrest in a language that they could understand. Several complained that they were not shown the Hellenic Police Informational Bulletin, which contains prisoners' rights in a variety of languages, and that they were forced to sign blank documents later used for their deportation.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits the invasion of privacy and searches without warrants, and the law permits the monitoring of personal communications only under strict judicial controls; however, these provisions were not always respected in practice.

Turcophone and Slavophone activists complained of continued police surveillance. Police conducted regular raids and searches of Romani neighborhoods for alleged criminal suspects, drugs, and weapons. Local authorities evicted or threatened to evict Roma from camps and tent dwellings during the year (see Section 5).

Section 2

Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice; however, legal restrictions on free speech remained in force. The law prohibits exposing to danger of disturbance the friendly relations of the state with foreign states; spreading false information and rumors liable to create concern and fear among citizens and cause disturbances in the country's international relations; and inciting citizens to rivalry and division leading to disturbing the peace or acts of violence. However, these prohibitions were very rarely invoked. In most criminal defamation cases, defendants typically were released on bail pending appeal without serving time in jail.

In August, two foreign journalists alleged that the Coast Guard arrested, insulted, and beat them when they attempted to film a restricted security area of the port of Piraeus during the Olympic Games. The journalists filed a complaint and the Merchant Marine Ministry ordered an inquiry. No results were available by year's end.

The Constitution provides that the Government exercise "immediate control" over radio and television, and the law establishes ownership limits on media frequencies. The Ministry of Press and Mass Media has final authority over radio and television licensing; the National Radio and Television Council (ESR) has an advisory role.

Independent radio and television stations were active and expressed a wide variety of views with little government restriction. State-run stations tended to emphasize the Government's views but also reported objectively on other parties' programs and positions. Turkish-language television programs were widely available via satellite in Thrace.

There were numerous independent newspapers and magazines. Satirical and opposition newspapers routinely criticized state authorities. Members of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities were generally able to publish materials freely, often in their native language.

The Constitution allows for seizure, by order of the public prosecutor, of publications that insult the President, offend religious beliefs, contain obscene articles, advocate violent overthrow of the political system, or disclose military and defense information. There were no such seizures during the year.

The Greek publisher and Austrian author of a comic book that police deemed insulting to the Christian faith were scheduled to stand trial on blasphemy charges in January 2005. In February 2003, police confiscated approximately 50 copies of the comic book from bookstores.

In July, police seized equipment and arrested the owner of a private radio station in Northern Greece that had been broadcasting in a Slavophone dialect. The police shut down the station on grounds that it did not have a license to broadcast. The station claimed that it was singled out because of its ethnic affiliation, since there were many other radio stations in the northern part of the country that operated without proper licenses.

In May, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that a court had violated the European Convention on Human Rights and awarded two journalists \$42,500 (32,179 euros). The case stemmed from an article the journalists wrote in 1995 describing unlawful conduct by public prosecutors in Preveza, Epirus, and the political ties that protected the prosecutors. The ECHR

reversed a court award against the journalists for disparaging the honor and reputation of one of the prosecutors.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the freedoms of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice; however, the courts continued to place legal restrictions on the names of associations involving ethnic minorities (see Section 5).

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, non-Orthodox groups at times faced administrative obstacles or legal restrictions on religious practices.

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodoxy) as the "prevailing" religion. The Greek Orthodox Church exercised significant political and economic influence. The Government financially supported the Greek Orthodox Church and also paid the salaries and some expenses of the two official Muslim religious leaders in Thrace.

The Government, by virtue of the Orthodox Church's status as the prevailing religion, recognizes de facto its canon law. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Greek Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions. Greek Orthodox Church officials refused to enter into dialogue with religious groups they considered harmful to Greek Orthodox worshippers and instructed their members to shun members of these faiths.

The Government did not have an established procedure for recognizing religions. Recognition was granted indirectly by applying for and receiving a "house of prayer" permit. Some newer religions had problems getting these permits. Although Jehovah's Witnesses have a recognized religion, members continued to face harassment, mainly in the form of arbitrary identity checks.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters.

Despite the Vouli's approval of a bill in 2003 allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in the Athens area, no construction had started by the end of the year and, as a consequence, Muslims in Athens continued congregating in about 25 unofficial prayer rooms.

Muslims are accorded the status of an official minority in Thrace, and the Government selects two official Muslim religious leaders, or "muftis", there. While much of the community accepted the two officially appointed muftis, some Muslims, with support from Turkey, "elected" two different muftis. The courts repeatedly convicted one mufti for usurping the authority of the official mufti; however, his sentences remained suspended and were pending appeal at year's end.

Non-Orthodox citizens claimed that they faced career limits in the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and civil service due to their religion. The employment rate of Muslims in the public sector and in state-owned companies was much lower than the Muslim percentage of the population.

The law requires that recognized religious groups obtain permits from the Ministry of Education and Religion to open houses of worship. By law, the Ministry may base a permit decision on the opinion of the local Greek Orthodox bishop. According to Ministry officials, once a recognized religion received a permit, applications for additional houses of prayer were approved routinely. Non-Greek Orthodox churches must provide separate and lengthy applications to authorities on such matters as gaining permission to move places of worship to larger facilities. In May, a priest defrocked by the Greek Orthodox Church in the northern part of the country (but still in good standing with the Orthodox Church in the Republic of Macedonia) was given a 3-month suspended prison sentence for holding religious services without a house of prayer permit. There was no decision on the priest's appeal of the judgment at year's end.

The Scientologists have not been able to register or build a house of prayer. Followers of the ancient Greek religions applied twice in the last 3 years for a house of prayer permit but have not received an official response to their applications, despite advice of the Ombudsman to the Ministry of Education and Religions to officially respond to their requests.

The Constitution prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that religious rites may not disturb public order or offend moral principles. Police regularly detained members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses (on average once every 2 weeks), usually after receiving complaints that they were engaged in proselytizing. In most cases, police held these persons for several hours and then released them without filing charges. Many reported that police did not allow them to call their lawyers and verbally abused them for their religious beliefs.

Several foreign religious groups, including Protestant groups and Mormons, continued to report difficulty renewing the visas of their non-European Union (EU) citizen ministers because there is not a distinct visa category for religious workers and because

of the Government's restrictive interpretation of its obligations to control entry to non-EU citizens under the Schengen Treaty.

Religious instruction was mandatory for all Greek Orthodox students in primary and secondary schools, but not for non-Orthodox students. Some government-approved religious textbooks made derogatory statements about non-Greek Orthodox faiths. Members of the Muslim community in Athens sought Islamic religious instruction for their children. Since schools did not supervise non-Orthodox children while Greek Orthodox children were taking religious instruction, the community complained that parents were effectively forced to have their children attend Greek Orthodox classes. In Thrace, the Government subsidized public schools for the Muslim minority and two Koranic schools. Turcophone activists criticized the quality of instruction at the minority schools and the state-sponsored Pedagogical Academy that trains teachers.

Anti-Semitism continued to exist, both in the mainstream and extremist press, and the press and public often did not clearly distinguish between criticism of Israel and comments about Jewish persons. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Wiesenthal Center, the Greek Helsinki Monitor, and the Anti-Defamation League criticized the press for carrying anti-Semitic stories and cartoons on several occasions during the year, particularly after Israeli forces killed Hamas leader Sheik Yassin.

Vandalism of Jewish monuments continued to be a problem, although the Government generally condemned such acts. In August, unknown persons desecrated a recently erected Holocaust memorial in Komotini. Police did not find the perpetrators in the reported 2003 desecration of monuments in Ioannina, and the cases were still open at year's end. Extreme right-wing groups painted anti-Semitic graffiti along with their symbols and organization names at several spots on the busy Athens-Corinth Highway. Some schoolbooks carried negative references to Roman Catholics, Jewish persons, and others. Bookstores sold and displayed anti-Semitic literature including the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

The Wiesenthal Center issued a travel advisory in November 2003 warning Jewish visitors about the failure of the country to curb growing anti-Semitism. The Greek Helsinki Monitor and the Wiesenthal Center protested the revival of traditions such as the burning of an effigy of Judas on some islands, sometimes known locally as the "burning of the Jew," which they maintained propagated hatred and fanaticism against Jews.

The Popular Orthodox Herald Party (LAOS), a small, extreme right-wing party, employed virulent nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. In June, LAOS leader George Karatzaferis won a seat in elections to the European Parliament. The extreme right-wing group "Golden Dawn" regularly painted anti-Semitic graffiti on bridges and other structures throughout the country.

Jewish community leaders have condemned anti-Semitic broadcasts on small private television stations, but authorities have not brought charges against these largely unlicensed operators.

On January 15, the Vouli approved declaring January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day, which was commemorated with events in Athens and Thessaloniki.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2004 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law permits the Government to remove citizenship from persons who commit acts contrary to the interests of the country for the benefit of a foreign state. While the law applies to citizens regardless of ethnicity, it has been enforced, in all but one case, only against citizens who identified themselves as members of the "Macedonian" minority. The Government did not reveal the number of such cases; there were no reports of new cases during the year. Dual citizens who lost their citizenship under this provision sometimes were prevented from entering the country on the passport of their second nationality. Activists charged that several expatriate Slavo-Macedonians, whose names appeared on a "black list" were barred from entering the country.

The Government has issued identification documents characterizing persons as "stateless" to 143 persons--mainly Muslims in Thrace--who lost their citizenship under a provision of the law that was repealed in 1998 and has permitted them to apply to reacquire citizenship. As of October, 65 of 111 applications had been granted and 46 were pending. In its Third Report on Greece, the ECRI strongly recommended that authorities take steps to facilitate recovery of citizenship to these persons.

The Constitution prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

The law provides for the granting of asylum and refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. However, the Government has largely not enforced a 1999 presidential decree that brought the law into compliance with the standards of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with regard to asylum procedures.

In practice, the Government provided minimal protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where they

feared persecution. However, the UNHCR, the Greek Council for Refugees, and the ECRI expressed concern that very few applicants were granted asylum without UNHCR involvement and that a publicly funded legal aid system was not available to provide counseling for asylum-seekers and refugees. During the first 9 months of the year, the Government granted refugee status to 11 (or 0.3 percent) of 3,450 applicants. The Government also provided temporary protection to individuals who do not qualify as asylees or refugees. During the first 9 months of the year, the Government granted temporary residence to 19 persons on humanitarian grounds. The overall recognition rate (convention and humanitarian status) amounted to 0.9 percent. The Government cooperated with the office of the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers. Individuals recognized as refugees are eligible for residency and work permits necessary to settle permanently.

The UNHCR, the Greek Council for Refugees, the U.N. Committee Against Torture, and the ECRI expressed concern about the country's asylum policy and practices, citing its insufficient reception facilities, low refugee recognition rates, underdeveloped systems for providing for refugee welfare, and insufficient counseling to assist integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Following the change of government in March, a group of domestic and international NGOs published a joint appeal that expressed concern over authorities' frequent violation of the rights of individuals who wished to apply for asylum, including local authorities' failure to inform them of their right to apply for asylum.

In December, police officers allegedly subjected a group of 40-60 Afghan asylum-seekers to interrogation techniques that included torture. The Prosecutor pressed felony charges against two policemen, who were awaiting trial at year's end.

The Coast Guard reported that 1,793 illegal immigrants were arrested between January and September. Conditions for illegal immigrants detained by authorities were often harsh. The UNHCR observed improvements during the year in some detention centers, including on the islands of Chios and Mytilini; however, sub-standard conditions persisted in others. For example, although improvement was noted in some parts of the Evros region, an old warehouse continued to be used to house illegal immigrants while a new reception center had not yet opened. Foreign observers reported "degrading" conditions in most of the refugee/immigrant detention centers. In September, 221 illegal immigrants, including 4 children, were held in Samos in a former warehouse with a 100-person capacity and only 2 toilets.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

On March 7, the New Democracy party won the majority of seats in the Vouli in free and fair elections. Opposition parties functioned freely and had broad access to the media. Voting is mandatory for citizens over age 18; however, there are many conditions under which citizens may be exempted from voting, and the Government did not apply any penalty for not voting.

Romani representatives reported that local authorities sometimes deprived Roma of the right to vote by refusing to register them. Many Roma had difficulty meeting municipal residency requirements to register to vote.

Corruption was a problem. International NGOs and human rights and antitrafficking groups stated that anticorruption efforts needed to be a higher government priority. In December, a number of judges were implicated in corruption. Government officials, including a former Justice Minister, and the Athens Bar Association called for immediate investigations to protect the integrity of the justice system.

There were 38 women in the 300-seat Vouli, including the Speaker, the first woman to hold the position. There was 1 woman among the 19 ministers in the Cabinet, and women held 1 of the 27 subministerial positions. A quota system requires 30 percent of all local government candidates to be women.

There was 1 member of the Muslim minority in the 300-seat Vouli. There were no members of minorities in the Cabinet. There were occasionally complaints that the Government limited the right of some individuals, particularly Muslims and Slavo-Macedonians, to speak publicly and associate freely on the basis of their self-proclaimed ethnic identity.

A government-appointed regional administrator of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace has statutory responsibility for oversight of rights provided the Muslim minority in Thrace, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs retains an important advisory role.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A wide variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without restriction in the country, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases; however, the Government's cooperation with domestic groups varied. The Government usually cooperated with international human rights groups, had good working relations with them, and made an effort to take their views into account.

There was a government ombudsman whose office provided an effective means for citizens to address human rights and religious freedom problems. The office was granted adequate resources to perform its functions and was widely recognized. In

the first 9 months of the year, the office had received 1,274 complaints, of which 47 were directly related to human rights and the remainder related to civic rights and civic differences.

The government-funded National Human Rights Committee is an autonomous human rights body that operates independently of government or party control or influence. The Committee is the Government's advisory organ on protection of human rights and had adequate resources. It cooperated effectively with the Government to promote legislation protecting and enhancing human rights. During the year, it produced reports and recommendations on human rights problems, including human rights standards for law enforcement, antiterrorism measures, and application of EU legislation against discrimination.

Section 5

Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The Constitution provides for equality before the law irrespective of nationality, race, language, or political belief; however, government respect for these rights was inconsistent in practice.

Women

Violence against women was a problem. The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence; however, it can be prosecuted under the general assault statute. The General Secretariat for the Equality of the Sexes (GSES), an independent government agency, provided counseling and assistance to domestic violence victims. The reported incidence of violence against women was low; however, the GSES believed that the actual incidence was high. The GSES estimated that only 6 to 10 percent of victims contacted the police, and only a small fraction of those cases reached trial. The GSES claimed that police tended to discourage women from pursuing domestic violence charges, instead encouraging them to undertake reconciliation efforts, and that courts were lenient when dealing with domestic violence cases. The GSES, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Order, continued courses to train police on how to deal with domestic violence victims.

Two GSES shelters for battered women and their children, in Athens and Piraeus, offered services, including legal and psychological help. The GSES operated a 24-hour emergency telephone hotline for abused women. The Ministry of Health and Welfare's Emergency Social Care Unit also operated a hotline providing referrals and psychological counseling.

Nonconsensual sex in any setting is a crime; however, there is no specific spousal rape law. Conviction rates for rape were low for first time offenders, but sentences were harsh for repeat offenders. There have been no cases of spousal rape before the courts in recent years.

Prostitution is legal at the age of 18. Prostitutes must register at the local prefecture and carry a medical card that is updated every 2 weeks. It was estimated that fewer than 1,000 women were legally employed as prostitutes. Approximately 20,000 women, most of foreign origin, worked as illegal prostitutes. According to experts, a significant number of these women were trafficking victims (see Section 5, Trafficking).

The law prohibits sexual harassment, but penalties are lenient. The Government has not yet implemented an EU directive on sexual harassment that provides guidelines for sanctions, legal action, and compensation for victims. Unions reported that lawsuits for sexual harassment were very rare and that only four women had filed such charges in the past 5 years. In all four cases, the courts reportedly imposed very lenient civil sentences. The state-run Research Center for Equality reported that 10 percent of women have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. The vast majority of these quit their jobs and did not file charges.

The law provides for equal pay for equal work; however, according to official statistics in 2003, women's pay amounted to 75.8 percent of men's pay. Although relatively few occupied senior positions, women continued to enter traditionally male-dominated occupations such as the legal and medical professions in larger numbers. Women were underrepresented in labor unions' leadership. During the year, the Bank of Greece published a report noting that unemployment was much higher among women than men (15 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively), while women constituted just 42.5 percent of the work force. Women's employment in part-time jobs was 8.1 percent while men's was 2.3 percent.

The GSES operated regional employment offices for women in Thessaloniki and Patras that provided vocational training for unemployed women, programs to reinforce entrepreneurship, subsidies to establish businesses, and information and counseling to unemployed women. It also operated childcare facilities to enable unemployed women to attend training courses and look for jobs.

Children

The Government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare and amply funded a system of public education and health care. Government agencies with responsibility for children's issues included the National Organization for Social Care, which had a national network of offices and was active in the field of child protection. There was also a department for children's rights in the Ombudsman's office.

Education was free and compulsory through the ninth grade. According to the 2001 census, 99.4 percent of school-age children attended school; however, noncompliance with the compulsory education requirement was a significant problem in the Romani community. University education was public and free at all levels, but the number of applicants greatly exceeded available places. Most children completed secondary education.

Violence against children was a problem; however, there was no societal pattern of abuse. The law prohibits the mistreatment of children and sets penalties for violators, and the Government effectively enforced these provisions. No national data existed on the incidence of child abuse; authorities, other than police, were not required to report such cases. According to UNICEF and local NGOs, the majority of street children (usually indigenous Roma or Albanian Roma) were exploited by family members who forced them to work in the streets, usually begging or selling small items.

Welfare laws provide for preventive and treatment programs for abused and neglected children. These laws seek to ensure the availability of alternative family care or institutional placement. However, children's rights advocacy groups claimed that government residential care centers provided inadequate and low quality protection of children at high risk of abuse due to a lack of coordination between welfare services and the courts, inadequate funding of the welfare system, and poor staffing of the care centers. Athens had two municipal shelters for battered children. Child health specialists noted that the number of children in residential care facilities was decreasing, while the number in foster care was rising. With EU funding, special care was available for juvenile offenders, Romani children, children from remote mountain and island areas, and children with disabilities.

In 2003, the Government ended a program to shelter street children from Albania due to a lack of eligible children. The U.N. Committee Against Torture expressed concern that inadequate measures had been taken to protect children picked up by the security police and taken into state care during the 1998-2003 period. The Prosecutor accepted a criminal complaint submitted by the Greek Helsinki Monitor and an appeal by the U.N. Committee Against Torture and, in December, pressed felony charges against members of the administration of the Agia Varvara shelter relating to the case of 502 Albanian children that remained unaccounted for after being kept in state custody in the shelter program between 1998 and 2003.

There were reports that trafficking of children--mainly for forced labor and sexual exploitation--was a problem (see Sections 5, Trafficking and 6.d.).

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, the country was both a transit and destination country for significant numbers of women, men, and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. There were allegations that some police officers were involved in trafficking rings or accepted bribes from traffickers.

The law considers trafficking in persons a criminal offense and provides for imprisonment of up to 10 years and fines of approximately \$13,500 to \$67,500 (10,000 to 50,000 euros) for convicted traffickers. Penalties are harsher for traffickers of children.

During the year, police investigated 65 trafficking cases, of which 29 were allegedly committed by criminal networks, charged 352 persons with trafficking-related crimes, and located 181 victims of trafficking, although NGOs reported there were many more victims during the period. In June, two child traffickers in the border region of Evros were given 13- and 14-year prison sentences and fined \$94,500-97,200 (70,000-72,000 euros) each; they were in prison awaiting the outcome of their appeals at year's end. Comprehensive conviction information was not available at year's end.

Ministries with primary responsibility for combating trafficking are Health and Welfare, Justice, Public Order, and Foreign Affairs, with support from the Ministries of Interior, Equality, Economy and Finance, Education, and Employment and Social Protection. There is a governmental National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons and an interministerial committee to coordinate antitrafficking efforts. In June, the Government designated two special prosecutors to lead an informal group to standardize government efforts to screen women for victims of trafficking, transfer detained victims to shelters, and prosecute trafficking cases.

During the year, the country's law enforcement agencies participated in a multinational regionwide antitrafficking effort called "Mirage 2004."

The country was both a transit and destination country for trafficked women, men, and children. Major countries of origin included Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Albania, Moldova, Romania, and Belarus. Women from many other countries were trafficked to the country and in some cases were reportedly trafficked on to Italy and other EU countries as well as to the Middle East.

According to one academic observer, trafficking in women and children for prostitution in the country has decreased since the end of 2002. The observer estimated that approximately 40,000 women and children, most between the ages of 12 and 25, were trafficked to the country for prostitution each year between 1998 and 2002, but decreased to 20,000 in 2003 and to 13,000 in the reporting year. Unofficial NGO estimates placed approximately 13,000 to 14,000 trafficked women and girls in the country at any given time, although authorities estimated the number of trafficked women and children was much lower.

Trafficking of children was a problem. While NGOs and police reported that child trafficking decreased during the year, the practice persisted. Most child trafficking victims were Albanian Roma children trafficked for labor exploitation or teenage girls trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation. Albanian children made up the majority of children trafficked for forced labor, begging, and stealing. There were reports that some Albanian Roma parents "sold" or "rented" their children to traffickers in exchange for a monthly income (see Section 6.d.); however, NGOs reported that the practice of "renting" children has dramatically decreased as it has become easier for Albanian parents to emigrate to the country. As recently as 2003, Albania police estimated that more than 1,000 children were trafficked in the country and forced to beg. The primary anti-child trafficking NGO reported that, of the 173 children it identified begging in the streets in the first 11 months of the year, 22 were victims of trafficking. During the Olympics, a child trafficking NGO did extensive street sweeps and located and repatriated six trafficked Albanian boys. An NGO that works on child-trafficking problems reported that some legalized Albanian immigrants residing in the country exploited their children.

In July, police dismantled a network dealing in child pornography through the Internet. The perpetrators had developed a network of customers in 20 countries. At year's end, 11 Romanians were in detention and awaiting trial after their arrest in September 2003 for operating a forced child-begging racket in central Athens.

Police often detained minors trafficked into the country as criminals. Those under the age of 12 were placed in state-run orphanages, while children as young as 13 were jailed for begging or illegal immigration. According to one NGO, the Government continued detaining and deporting children in groups, returning them to the border with Albania without ensuring either their reception by Albanian authorities or their protection from re-trafficking, although smaller numbers of children were involved than in 2003. Few such repatriations were conducted with advance notice to prepare families or to transport the children safely. Some reports indicated that children were deported with less than 24 hours notice and without sufficient cross-border coordination.

Some women and children arrived as "tourists" or illegal immigrants; seeking work, they were lured into prostitution by club owners who threatened them with deportation. Traffickers kidnapped some victims, including minors, from their homes abroad and smuggled them into the country, where they were sold to local procurers. Traffickers sometimes confined victims to apartments, hotels, and clubs against their will, failed to register them with authorities, and forced them to surrender their passports.

Many antitrafficking activists alleged that some police officers were involved in trafficking rings or accepted bribes from traffickers, including organized crime networks. In June, a Thessaloniki Court sentenced three police officers to between 3 and 5½ years in prison on corruption charges relating to their protection of a nightclub that employed trafficked women. The Bureau of Internal Affairs at the Ministry of Public Order investigated charges of police involvement but had not issued its report by year's end.

During the year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocated approximately \$4.2 million (3.1 million euros) for antitrafficking projects to implement the August 2003 Presidential decree establishing shelters for trafficking victims and encouraging cooperation between the Government and NGOs. A number of domestic NGOs also worked on trafficking issues during the year, but victim protection measures and referral mechanisms remained weak. The Government supported antitrafficking NGOs that ran public service announcements to raise awareness of trafficking. The Government inaugurated a 24-hour hotline for trafficking victims, and there were additional hotlines operated by NGOs.

On August 4, eight government ministries announced a comprehensive national action plan to fight human trafficking, including plans for legal assistance for victims, new public awareness campaigns, the use of Health Ministry centers to assist trafficking victims, creation of a national database on trafficking, and the amendment of the August 2003 presidential decree to facilitate victim recognition, residence permits, and training programs.

There were two government-run and three NGO-run shelters that assisted trafficking victims in Athens, and construction began on a shelter to be operated by Solidarity, an Orthodox church-affiliated NGO. There was one government-run shelter operating in Thessaloniki, and an additional NGO-run shelter for women opened in Thessaloniki in November. There was one shelter in Ioannina.

During the year, the Government began issuing special residence/work permits to trafficking victims; however, anecdotal reports indicated that trafficking victims continued to be deported. On June 3, the first residence permits were issued to two trafficked women, as provided for under the trafficking law. By November, there had been 24 residence permits issued to trafficking victims.

During the year, major radio stations and magazines carried announcements on trafficking in women and NGOs distributed antitrafficking brochures with funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Public Order published a multilingual "know-your-rights" pamphlet designed to inform persons identified as possible trafficking victims of resources at their disposal.

Persons with Disabilities

There was no systemic discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or in the provision of other government services. The law mandates access to buildings for persons with disabilities; however, authorities

enforced this law poorly. Only 5 percent of public buildings were fully accessible to persons with disabilities; most buildings with special ramps did not have special elevators and lavatories. Research conducted in 2003 by the Medical School of Athens showed that most Athens sidewalks were inaccessible for persons with disabilities.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare is responsible for providing welfare allowances and special schools to the disabled, but serious problems existed due to lack of personnel and funding. An organization for persons with disabilities alleged that only 10 percent of children with disabilities were able to attend school because many special schools were either closed or understaffed.

During the year, special wheelchair lifts for persons with mobility problems were constructed on the Acropolis, and two beaches in the country became accessible to persons with disabilities. In addition, issues involving persons with disabilities received greater public attention as a result of the Paralympic Games in Athens.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Albanian immigrants who make up approximately 5 percent of the population faced widespread societal discrimination, although Albanian legal residents encountered less official discrimination than Albanians residing in the country illegally. Immigrants--mostly Albanian citizens--accused police of physical, verbal, and other mistreatment. These immigrants also reported the confiscation and destruction of personal documents, particularly during police sweeps to apprehend illegal immigrants. The media regularly blamed Albanians for a reported rise in crime in recent years. The country's sometimes difficult relations with Albania intensified the problem.

On September 4, an Albanian immigrant was stabbed to death and approximately 20 others were injured during clashes across the country following a soccer game between the two countries. The Government condemned the incidents; police arrested one person in connection with the stabbing, who was awaiting trial at year's end. Immigrant associations denounced racist violence in the country and charged that police had not intervened to arrest far-right extremists.

Widespread public debate continued during the year over whether "foreign" students should be allowed to carry the Greek flag at local National Day parades, an honor that is normally accorded students with the highest marks in their school. In October, classmates of one such student in Achaia occupied their school to protest her carrying the flag, and she subsequently declined the honor. Ministry of Education officials and local authorities condemned the protesters, and the Nomarch of Achaia said that the students' attitude neither honored the Achaia region nor reflected the feelings of the citizens, parents, and the school community. Another student in the northern part of the country gave up the honor before his classmates reacted. High school students in Thessaloniki organized protests against a school board decision to give the flag to an Albanian student.

A number of citizens identified themselves as Turks, Pomaks, Vlachs, Roma, Arvanites (Orthodox Christians who speak a dialect of Albanian), or "Macedonians" or "Slavomacedonians." The Government formally recognized only the "Muslim minority" and did not officially acknowledge the existence of any ethnic groups, principally Slavophones, under the term "minority." However, the previous government affirmed an individual right of self-identification. Nevertheless, some individuals who defined themselves as members of a minority found it difficult to express their identity freely and to maintain their culture. Use of the terms "Tourkos" and "Tourkikos" ("Turk" and "Turkish") is prohibited in titles of organizations, although individuals legally may call themselves "Tourkos." To most Greeks, the words "Tourkos" and "Tourkikos" connote Turkish identity or loyalties, and many object to their use by Greek citizens of Turkish origin. At year's end, an appeal from the "Turkish Union of Xanthi," established in 1927, was before the Supreme Court and a petition for the establishment of a "Turkish Women's Union" was also pending.

The Government did not recognize the Slavic dialect spoken by an indeterminate number of persons in the northwestern area of the country as "Macedonian," a language distinct from Bulgarian. This group's use of the term "Macedonian" has generated strong objections among the 2.2 million non-Slavophone inhabitants of the northern region of Greek Macedonia who use the term "Macedonian" to identify themselves. Members of this group asserted that the Government pursued a policy designed to discourage use of their language. Activists of the Rainbow Party, which represents the interests of this group, said that they were forced to cancel plans to hold a conference in Florina in December 2003 and in January because no one would rent them a meeting hall. There were reports that right wing extremists threatened locals with violence if they participated in or facilitated the conference. In May, the conference took place in Thessaloniki under heavy police protection and in a climate made hostile by local government authorities.

In December 2003, the Florina First Instance Court rejected for a second time an application for registration by the association "Home for Macedonian Civilization." This occurred notwithstanding that, in 1998, the ECHR had criticized the Government's refusal to recognize the association as a violation of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms.

Roma continued to face widespread governmental and societal discrimination. In April, the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) issued a report that claimed that Roma were subject to systematic police abuse, mistreatment while in police custody, regular raids and searches of Romani neighborhoods for criminal suspects, drugs, and weapons, and educational discrimination (see Section 1.c.). The ECRI report noted with concern that the situation of Roma remained serious and that Roma continued to face discrimination and difficulty in the areas of housing, employment, education, and access to public service. There were anecdotal reports of some societal discrimination, such as landlords refusing to rent apartments to Romani and non-Romani parents withdrawing their children from schools attended by Romani children.

There were frequent police raids on Romani settlements and harsh police treatment of Roma in the Aspropyrgos settlement near Athens. Authorities took no action in the 2002 case of a police officer who allegedly kicked a pregnant woman, who later miscarried, during a raid on the Aspropyrgos camp. Romani families who had lived for decades in settlements close to Olympic venues were evicted and left to find alternate shelter after local municipalities reportedly reneged on their commitment to provide replacement housing with subsidized rent for the families. In November, the U.N. Committee Against Torture expressed concern at instances of ill treatment of Roma by public officials in situations of forced evictions or relocation.

The law prohibits the encampment of "wandering nomads" without a permit and forces Roma to establish settlements "outside inhabited areas" and far from permanent housing. There were approximately 70 Romani camps in the country. Local and international NGOs charged that the enforced separation contravened the country's commitments under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Local authorities harassed and threatened to evict Roma from their camps or other dwellings. The NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor reported that police threatened to evict Romani tent-dwellers in the Aspropyrgos area outside Athens in April and May 2003. The European Roma Rights Center and the Greek Helsinki Monitor criticized the demolition of the homes of eight Romani families in late October in Patras. Roma in Tiryns, Peloponnese were in a court battle to avoid eviction from a settlement there.

Roma frequently faced societal discrimination in employment and in housing, particularly when attempting to rent accommodations. The illiteracy rate among Roma was estimated at 80 percent. Poverty, illiteracy, and societal prejudice were most severe among migrant Roma or those who lived in quasi-permanent settlements. Most Romani camps had no running water, electricity, garbage disposal, or sewage treatment. The approximately 400 Romani families in Tyrnavos, Thessaly lived in tents because authorities refused to include the area in city planning.

Romani representatives reported that some local authorities have refused to register Roma as residents. Until registered with a municipality, a citizen cannot vote or exercise other civil rights such as obtaining an official marriage, commercial, or driver's license, or contributing to social security. It was estimated that 90 percent of Roma were not insured by the public social security systems because they were unable to make the required contributions. Indigent Roma were entitled to free health care provided all citizens; however, their access at times was hindered by the distance between their encampments and public health facilities.

The Government considers the Roma to be a "socially excluded" or "sensitive" group, not a "minority." As a result, government policy was to encourage the integration of Roma. The Ministry of Education has instructed school principals to promote integration.

In June, residents in Sagaika, Patras, demonstrated at an elementary school to discourage Romani parents from enrolling their children in the school.

The Ministry of Interior headed an interministerial committee that coordinated projects for the 85,000 to 120,000 Roma the Government estimated were in the country (unofficial estimates ranged from 250,000 to 350,000). By September, only 30 cities had responded to the Ministry of Interior's 2003 invitation to 75 cities with Romani populations to identify areas in which it could build housing for Roma. Among the program's provisions were very low interest housing loans for Roma, which have had varying success rates in different areas of the country. Municipalities outside Thessaloniki have built prefabricated Romani neighborhoods.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare continued projects to address the chronic problems of the Romani community, including training courses for civil servants, police, and teachers to increase their sensitivity to Romani problems, the development of teaching materials for Romani children, the establishment of six youth centers in areas close to Romani communities, and the deployment of mobile health units to address the needs of itinerant Roma.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The organization Greek Homosexual Community (OKE) alleged that police often abused and harassed homosexuals and transvestites and subjected them to arbitrary identity checks and to bodily searches in public places.

In December, the broadcasting regulator ESR fined a radio station over insulting language used on a radio show presented by a lesbian, and the station subsequently cancelled the show. The Gay and Lesbian Community of Greece (OLKE) and OKE condemned the ESR ruling as homophobic and lodged complaints with the Government over what it described as a discriminatory decision.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution and law provide workers the right to form and join unions of their choice, and workers exercised this right. All workers, with the exception of the military, have the right to form or join unions. Approximately 26 percent of nonagricultural

salaried employees were union members. Unions received most of their funding from a Ministry of Labor organization, the Workers' Hearth, which distributes mandatory contributions from employees and employers. Workers, employers, and the state were represented in equal numbers on the board of directors of the Workers' Hearth.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the Government protected this right in practice. The law provides for the right to bargain collectively in the private sector and in public corporations, and unions exercised this right freely. The law provides for the right to strike, and workers in the private sector and in public corporations exercised this right in practice. Civil servants have the right to organize, to bargain collectively with the Ministry of Public Administration, and to strike. Police have the right to organize and to demonstrate, but not to strike.

The law provides for mediation of labor disputes, with compulsory arbitration as a last resort. The National Mediation, Reconciliation, and Arbitration Organization is responsible for mediation and arbitration of labor disputes involving the private sector and public corporations. Mediation is voluntary; however, the Organization may require compulsory arbitration if mediation fails to resolve a dispute.

There are some legal restrictions on strikes, including a mandatory notice period of 4 days for public utilities and 24 hours for the private sector. The law mandates a skeleton staff during strikes affecting public services. Courts may declare a strike illegal; however, such decisions were seldom enforced. Unions complained that this judicial power deterred some of their members from participating in strikes. Courts declared some strikes illegal during the year for such reasons as failure of the union to give adequate advance notice of the strike or a union making new demands during the course of the strike. During the year, no workers were prosecuted for striking.

There are no special laws or exemptions from regular labor laws in the country's three free trade zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred (see Sections 5 and 6.d.).

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

Child labor was a problem, although international and local observers agreed that numbers of working children have decreased in recent years. A number of children were illegally employed in the streets of the country in jobs from windshield washing to prostitution. The Government and NGOs believed that the majority of beggars were either indigenous or Albanian Roma. There were reports that children from Albania were trafficked and forced to beg; however, child trafficking NGOs reported a decrease in this abuse (see Section 5). Some parents forced their children to beg for money or food. During the year, heightened security because of the Olympics resulted in a significant decrease in the number of street children who panhandled or peddled at city intersections on behalf of adult family members or for criminal gangs.

The minimum age for employment in the industrial sector is 15 years, with higher limits for some activities. The minimum age is 12 years in family businesses, theaters, and the cinema. These age limits were enforced by occasional Labor Inspectorate spot checks and were generally observed. However, families engaged in agriculture, food service, and merchandising often had younger family members assisting them at least part time.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The GSEE and the Employers' Association determine a national minimum wage through collective bargaining. The Ministry of Labor routinely ratified this minimum wage, which has the force of law and applies to all workers. The minimum wage of approximately \$37 (28 euros) daily and \$813 (616 euros) monthly, effective September 1, provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The maximum legal workweek is 40 hours in the private sector and 37.5 hours in the public sector. The law provides for at least one 24-hour rest period per week, mandates paid vacation of 1 month per year, and sets limits on overtime.

The law provides for minimum standards of occupational health and safety. The GSEE characterized health and safety laws as satisfactory, but stated that enforcement by the Labor Inspectorate was inadequate. Workers do not have the legal right to remove themselves from situations that they believe endanger their health; however, they do have the right to lodge a confidential complaint with the Labor Inspectorate. Inspectors have the right to close down machinery or a process for up to 5 days if they see safety or health hazards that they believe represent an imminent danger to the workers.

The law protects foreign workers; however, their wages were lower and they worked longer hours than citizens. Many employers did not make social security contributions for illegal foreign workers, making their legalization impossible.